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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 USNATO 000304

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SUBJECT: ALLIES URGE MACEDONIA TO STEP UP PACE OF REFORMS  
IN RUN-UP TO NATO ENLARGEMENT DECISIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Victoria Nuland for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In a May 9 meeting with the North Atlantic Council, the Macedonian Foreign and Defense Ministers expressed confidence that Macedonia would continue to make progress on reforms and be ready to join NATO when the Alliance makes decisions on enlargement at its 2008 Summit. Perm Reps stressed there were no guarantees about the outcome of NATO's enlargement decisions in 2008 and Macedonia should continue to work to meet NATO's performance-based standards. They urged Macedonia to focus especially on improving the dialogue between the government and opposition, implementing judicial reform, and fighting crime and corruption. In a bilateral meeting that followed, Ambassador Nuland urged the Macedonian government to conclude an agreement with the opposition within the next ten days to end the boycott of Parliament. She also urged Macedonia to not only refrain from any further actions or remarks that might antagonize Greece over the name issue, but also to launch a charm offensive towards Athens. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) In a May 9 meeting with the North Atlantic Council to review Macedonia's progress under NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP), Foreign Minister Milososki and Minister of Defense Elenovski recounted Macedonia's reform achievements over the last year. Milososki noted that eight annual cycles in MAP had helped transform Macedonia from a security consumer to a security provider. He said that close to 90 percent of the population support NATO membership and commented that "people have waited too long." Macedonia's membership in NATO would contribute to regional stability since "more NATO members in the Balkans mean a more stable Balkans."

¶3. (C) Milososki reported the government was in a substantive dialogue with the opposition discussing terms to end the Parliamentary boycott of the ethnic Albanian DUI party. The dialogue was making progress and he expected positive results soon. He expressed "undiminished dedication" to implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement and said Macedonia had tripled its budget for hiring minority civil servants and was opening new government positions for minorities. Phase two of decentralization would start in July, but because most municipalities did not meet the qualifications to take on increased powers the government had decided to be flexible on the criteria, especially for municipalities led by opposition parties. He noted that drafting of a religious freedom law, in coordination with the Venice Commission and the OSCE, was in its final stages and should soon move to Parliament.

¶4. (C) Milososki cited results in the fight against crime and corruption, noting the police had successfully cut off

several trafficking routes and that several high profile corruption cases had resulted in convictions. Macedonia was contributing to regional stability by providing logistical support to KFOR and playing a constructive role in Kosovo, including by supporting the Ahtisaari proposal. He said Macedonia did not prefer a continuation of the status quo in Kosovo and believed Kosovo's final status should be decided sooner rather than later.

15. (C) Defense Minister Elenovski reported that transformation of the Macedonian armed forces had resulted in a fully professional force with a completely transformed command structure and greater expeditionary capabilities. He noted that 24 percent of active military personnel were from minority communities. Macedonia's contributions to international operations had increased 100 percent over last year and Macedonia was contributing forces to ISAF, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the EU Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He said Macedonia had decided to contribute to a UN peacekeeping operation for the first time by contributing two officers to UNIFIL. Reform priorities in the coming year would include; introducing a modern personnel management system, promoting education and training, improving medical and logistics support, meeting NATO Partnership Goals, and addressing air surveillance and air policing issues.

PERM REPS NOTE IMPROVEMENTS, BUT MACEDONIA NOT THERE YET

16. (C) In their comments, Perm Reps urged Macedonia to continue to implement reforms in the run up to the 2008 Summit, especially in the areas of improving dialogue between the government and opposition, implementing judicial reform, and fighting crime and corruption. Most Perm Reps also stressed that the Alliance had made no decisions yet on membership invitations and there were no guarantees about the

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outcome, which would depend on Macedonia's performance.

17. (C) Ambassador Nuland said the U.S. hoped Macedonia would be able to meet NATO's performance-based membership criteria and join the Alliance. Macedonian success in joining NATO would set an important example for the region as a functioning multi-ethnic society in the Balkans. While Macedonia had made progress it still had "much more work to do." Allies would be looking to see whether Macedonia's democracy was mature and stable enough so that progress was not just sustainable, but irreversible. Progress in the dialogue with the opposition was encouraging, but needed to be brought to closure so that work in the Parliament could resume. Priority reforms included ensuring equitable minority representation, implementing phase two of decentralization, adopting a religious freedom law, implementing the Law on Police and the National Strategy for Judicial Reforms, and prosecuting high-level crime and corruption cases.

18. (C) Spanish Perm Rep Benavides noted the political atmosphere in Macedonia had improved and while the government's dialogue with the opposition had produced results it needed to continue. UK Perm Rep Eldon said he understood the government was currently not the party holding back progress in the dialogue with the opposition, but the democratic process must be made to work and "no one was off the hook." Eldon expressed concern about several demotions in the MFA's directorate of European affairs and stressed the need for a review of legislation on employment and work practices, an apolitical and professional civil service, and a merit-based process for military appointments. Italian Perm Rep Stefanini urged Macedonia to focus on the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, treatment of minorities, and the fight against organized crime and corruption.

19. (C) Several Perm Reps expressed strong support for Macedonia's NATO candidacy, with Slovenian Perm Rep Cerar

expressing full confidence Macedonia would meet NATO's standards, and Estonian Perm Rep Tiido and Latvian Perm Rep Eichmanis hoping to see Macedonia as a member soon.

¶10. (C) Greek Perm Rep Zepos said progress in Macedonia "obviously causes a sense of satisfaction" and that Greece had "spared no effort" in supporting Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration, as long as performance criteria were met. He said Macedonia must realize the importance of full compliance with membership criteria and resolution of the dispute over Macedonia's name would greatly contribute to regional stability and to the Alliance's enlargement principle of good neighborly relations, which for Greece "was a must." He added that it was also necessary to avoid politically provocative actions or deviations from the 1995 Interim Agreement.

¶11. (C) In his response to Perm Reps' comments, Milososki thanked Greece for its support of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations "despite our small disagreements." He said he had been pleased to recently open a Greek language lab in a Macedonian Army barracks, which proved Macedonia wanted more cooperation with Greece. Macedonia was committed to resolving the name issue through the UN process. Relations with Greece "are not just good, they are great" and he was confident that sooner or later the two countries would come to a solution to their bilateral issues.

NULAND: END BOYCOTT NOW, REACH OUT TO GREECE

¶12. (C) In a meeting with Milososki and Elenovski following the NAC, Ambassador Nuland praised the Macedonian government for rolling up its sleeves and making some progress in the stalemate between the government and the opposition, while reminding them they needed to conclude an agreement with the opposition this month. She told Milososki that by the time of the President's visit to the region and the EAPC Security Forum in Ohrid, both in June, the boycott of Parliament needed to be resolved so Macedonia could move on to other key reforms. Milososki said he thought Macedonia would have good news to pass along soon regarding a deal with the opposition. He mentioned he was looking for a date for a bilateral visit (for himself) to come to Washington and noted that following that, he may push the Prime Minister to make a trip as well.

¶13. (C) On the name issue, Ambassador Nuland said Macedonia needed not only to refrain from any more antagonizing actions or remarks, but also needed to launch a charm offensive towards Athens. She reminded the ministers that they need

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Greece (and Bulgaria) to get into NATO. She suggested Milososki invite Greek FM Backoyannis for a meeting in a third country to discuss ways to improve the bilateral relationship and to begin developing a personal relationship.

Moving away from the name issue, Amb Nuland suggested Skopje work harder on making Macedonia's case to Allies if they wanted to start bringing them around to support Macedonia's NATO membership. Nuland closed by noting the government had a lot of hard work to do in the coming weeks and, indeed, in the whole period up to the 2008 NATO Summit.

NULAND